



Press Release

Luxembourg, 14 December 2021

EU auditors recommend to set out a new European tourism strategy

The EU is the world's most visited region: in 2019, around 37 % of all international tourist arrivals had the EU as their destination. However, the EU's support for tourism needs a fresh strategic orientation, according to a special report published today by the European Court of Auditors. The auditors found that tourism-related projects funded under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) provided mixed results: some projects were sustainable and had contributed to fostering tourism activity in the region; others had had only a limited impact. In several cases, poor planning and project selection procedures had led to projects being reduced in scope, running over budget, and being delayed.

Tourism is a key economic sector in the EU: in 2019, it accounted for 9.9 % of the EU's gross domestic product, and 11.6 % of all EU jobs. Since 2015, up to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Commission has revised the EU's tourism priorities in the context of broader policy strategies, but it has not translated these priorities into a substantive action plan to support their implementation. As a reaction to the dramatic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the EU's tourism sector, the Commission put forward measures and proposals to mitigate the impact of this crisis on the EU's tourism industry and initiated action aimed at setting a tourism agenda for 2030.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the EU's tourism sector: tourism flows and tourism revenue fell sharply", said Pietro Russo, the member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the report. *"But this immediate shock is not the only challenge facing the EU's tourism sector. It needs to face up to other, more long-term challenges related to its green and digital transformation, its competitiveness, its sustainability, and its resilience."*

Where the auditors found examples of EU tourism funding having a less positive impact than hoped for, this was mostly for any of three reasons: because projects which received funding were isolated from other tourism infrastructure; because not enough effort had been made to market the projects effectively; or because the supported infrastructure was used primarily by the local community, not by visitors.

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is available at www.eca.europa.eu

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The auditors found the following issues with the indicators used for measuring the success of ERDF-funded tourism projects: the ERDF legislation for the 2014-2020 period included one common output indicator for tourism investments, but it was not used by all Member States; no common results indicators were used over that period; output indicators cannot measure all of the intended achievements of projects.

To remedy the issues they identified, the auditors recommend that the Commission should set out a new EU tourism strategy. They also recommend that the Commission should encourage Member States to apply selection procedures for ERDF-funded tourism investments to support this new strategic orientation.

Background information

The EU has a complementary role in tourism policy, supporting and coordinating the actions taken by the Member States. There was no dedicated EU budget for tourism in the 2014-2020 period. The European Commission defined the EU's current tourism strategy in 2010, and can financially support tourism through multiple EU programmes. This continues to be the case for the 2021-2027 period.

Special report 27/2021 *“EU support to tourism: Need for a fresh strategic orientation and a better funding approach”* is available on the [ECA website](#) in 23 EU languages.

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